

# MILLION

## A submission to the Home Affairs Committee's Knife Crime inquiry

## ***Messages from children and young people about knife crime***

**From 11 MILLION, led by the Children's Commissioner for England**

## October 2008



**"The 11 MILLION children and young people in England have a voice"**

Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Albert Aynsley-Green

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## 1 Who are we?

### How were we established?

11 MILLION is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green. The Children's Commissioner is a position created by the Children Act 2004.

### What do we do?

We have a statutory role to promote the views and interests of children and young people across England. This gives us a unique role in bringing children's ideas into the centre of the political process

### Meeting the challenges of the Children Act 2004

The Children Act requires the Children's Commissioner to be concerned with the five aspects of well-being covered in *Every Child Matters* – the national government initiative aimed at improving outcomes for all children. It also requires us to have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC underpins our work and informs which areas and issues on which we focus our efforts.

### Our long-term goals

Children and young people see significant improvements in their wellbeing and can freely enjoy their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Children and young people are more highly valued by adult society.

### Main project

Every year, we have a main project which is decided by children and young people. The lead project for 2008-09 is 'Gun and Knife Crime'.

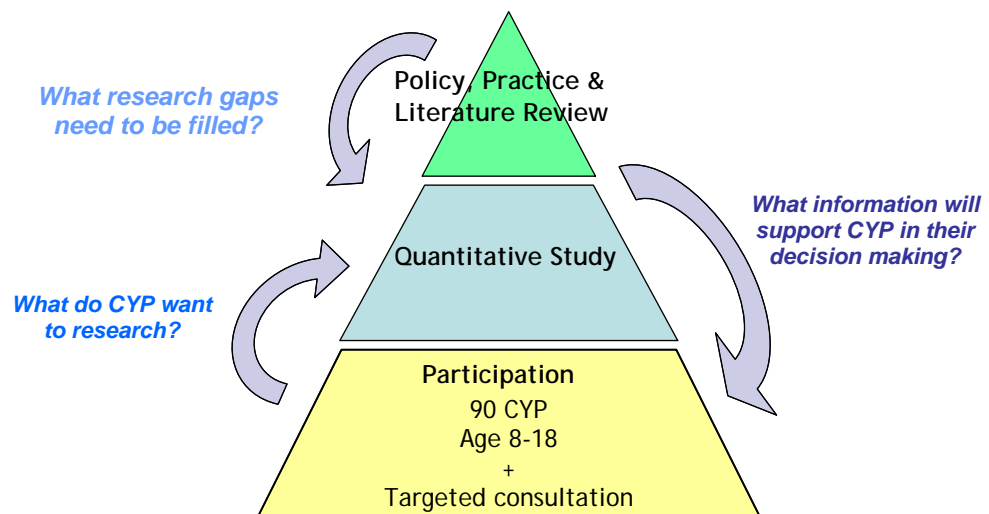
### Spotlight areas

Our 'spotlights' are the areas where we will influence emerging policy and debate. Our spotlights for 2008-09 are Respect and Discrimination, Asylum and Happy and Healthy.

## 2 Gun and Knife Crime - 11 MILLION's lead project for 2008-09

11 MILLION is committed to children and young people's participation in all aspects of its work. Children and young people choose the organisation's lead projects, selecting Gun and Knife Crime as our lead project in 2008-09.

The project has three main elements: participation is its bedrock; the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King's College London have been commissioned to undertake a literature review; and a quantitative study will also be conducted by a professional polling company, with significant input from young people. The project is conceptualised as a three-tiered pyramid.



The project team includes some 90 children and young people, aged between nine and 18, and from different geographical locations but all with experience, either directly or indirectly, of gun and / or knife crime. They are from are: Manchester, London, Leicestershire, Merseyside and Birmingham.

By the end of the project, we will have a body of evidence which we will draw together into a report that analyses the key issues, and identifies practice and policy priorities. The report will be solution-focussed. We expect to make recommendations using the Commissioner's statutory powers.

**This submission does not pre-empt 11 MILLION's final project report. It documents the views of the children and young people involved in the project, as well as the views of those who have given their views to 11 MILLION via our website ([www.11MILLION.org.uk](http://www.11MILLION.org.uk)).**

### 3 What children and young people have told us about the carrying of knives

#### Offender profiles, and public perceptions of levels of knife crime



**'It makes me nervous to go out some- times for i think that any-one can be carrying a knife and/or a gun !!!'**

**Little Miss Bossy, 11**

**'Gun and knife crime is really getting me worried, angry, nothing is safe any more even on the news every day there is a new murder story and it is making this world the worst place in the universe.'**

**Mia, 11**

**'The media publish that we are all knife welding maniacs, and this is just not true. We are just people. The media always focus on the bad. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT MINORITY.'**

**Golden Shadow, 14**

**'My cousin has been stabbed by a gang and it was heart-wrenching to know that a group of youths did that. Not all youths are like that though.'**

**Anonymous**

**'My mum wont let me go on my bike to my friends house who lives 20mins away because she is afraid of the violence.'**

**Titch, 15**

**'They say in the UK someone gets threatened with a knife every 8 minutes'**

**Jordan, 16**

**'I think gun and knife crime has been going on for years but we have not heard about it due to developing media. Also why are they cracking down on us (teens) when most of us have not been invovled in knife crimes?'**

**Tigz, 18**

Children and young people have told us they are deeply worried by knife crime. At the same time they believe that some adults are stigmatising teenagers in general for the misbehaviour of a few.

*11 MILLION shares the grave concern of children, young people and the public at large about the high level of knife crime. It is clear that safety fears are themselves playing into the problem. It is therefore unfortunate that public perceptions of the level of offending are often*

*exaggerated. As the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently noted, there is a widely held fear of young people, which has partly been fuelled by the consistently negative portrayal of young people in the media. Developments such as the 'Mosquito' device are symptomatic of public attitudes which are defined by fear and a lack of engagement. 11 MILLION therefore welcomes the work of the Department for Children, Schools and Families to break down barriers between children and adults.*

### **Causes: reasons for knife-carrying and use**



**'I think young people carry knives because they are scared for their own safety.'**

**Kenty, 12**

**'They do it because they may have family problems or feel insecure. But I think the main reason they do it is because they are scared of getting hurt so they hurt others so others can't hurt them.'**

**Gemma, 11**

**'I think children and young people carry knives because they were abused by their parents.'**

**Zachary, 10**

**'People carry guns & knives for defence & to attack people or to vandalise things.'**

**Finn, 11**

**'In the community I live in violence is a part of every day life of the young people'**

**Male, 18, Leeds**

**'There is temptation to use a knife when there is access to it.'**

**Hannah, 12**

Young people have told us they believe the main reason somebody would possess a knife is fear / protection, because they believe other young people are carrying knives, and mistakenly think that if they carry a knife, it offers them protection. This in turn encourages more young people to carry knives. They say some young people carry knives with a view to using them but believe this is only in a small minority of cases. In some cases knives are carried as status symbols, although young people do not believe this is usually the case.

*In the report of the four UK Children's Commissioners to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child earlier this year, 11 MILLION said that children and young people in England felt increasingly unsafe in*

*their local area with one in four concerned about violence, crime and weapons.*

### **Causes: Availability of knives**



**'there is a problem as you need a knife in your kitchen.'**  
**Comment at 11 MILLION annual event**

Young people have told us that knives are easily available, either from the kitchen at home or from shops. They say that those who are under 18 but who appear older are rarely challenged if they attempt to buy a knife in a shop.

*There is no evidence that knives are more or less widely available today than in previous years, yet knife crime has risen. While encouraging rigorous enforcement of the current age restriction, 11 MILLION recognises that 'supply side' measures can only have a marginal impact.*

### **Solutions: education, parents and community projects**



**'I raise self-esteem by working in schools and younger children look up to me wanting to know how they can do it too. Young people need to believe they can do things. We need to raise self-esteem from a primary school age.'**

**Kemoy, 17, Manchester**

**'Knife crime has affected my life because of the area where I live, which is near a council estate. I personally think the children who use knives are not to blame, it is their parents and the way they were brought up.'**

**Mizzy, 12**

**'People who carry weapons are misunderstood, not dangerous - the weapons are dangerous, so we should try to understand. They could be angry/alone/hurt, and we immediately assume they're horrible, and thats nor right. Why arent we helping?'**

**Beef Cheese, 11**

**'They do it because they may have family problems.'**

**Gemma, 11**

**'People who have no where to go might be violent, so more youth clubs and sports.'**

## **Hayley**

**'Education is the thing, education that guns and knives aren't cool.'**  
**Comment at 11 MILLION annual event**

The young people with whom we are working have identified a number of issues they believe would help reduce knife crime. Broadly, these are:

- raising self-esteem and aspirations among young people;
- rehabilitation, training and education for young offenders, which is linked to raising of self-esteem and aspirations;
- education programmes for young people, such as knife awareness programmes and knife referral projects, which demonstrate the risks and consequences of knife carrying;
- peer mentoring, with young people most likely to be influenced by those of their own or a similar age;
- giving young people more 'things to do', such as youth clubs, and ensuring that they are open at times that suit young people;
- importance of role models, and the belief that good role models, and good mentors, are those who have come from a similar background and succeeded, thereby offering inspiration and support;
- early intervention schemes which support vulnerable children or young people, such as those exposed to known risk factors: parental drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence, or a parent involved in crime.

## **Solutions: police operations, amnesties and enforcement**



**'Get more police on the streets.'**  
**Comment at 11 MILLION annual event**

**'Unite police and young people and not make them hate each other.'**

**Anonymous**

**'[Stop and search] should be done in a private place.'**  
**Chamel, 14**

**'I don't think that it is right that every young person gets stopped and searched every time the police see them.'**  
**Mickie, 18, Manchester**

**'More police patrolling areas and schools to help young people have a fun and good time in schools and at home.'**  
**Boy, 10, Birmingham**



**'People should not be allowed to carry knives. The police should continue confiscating knives and arresting people.'**

**Dorina, 10, London**

**'Consultations with police to have better communication and understanding with young people especially.'**

**Comment at 11 MILLION annual event**

**'my school were going to get metal detectors that was ages ago we still havent got them I think that we need them because there was a stabbing out sid'**

**Emma, 11**

Almost all the project's children and young people think stop-and-search has a part to play in reducing knife crime. Young people see the need for, and indeed want, targeted stop-and-search operations based on intelligence.

Many of the project's teenagers have themselves been stopped and searched. They report unacceptably wide variations in the way stop-and-searches are conducted. Sometimes police officers treat them with respect; but too often they say they are made to feel like criminals and that they then develop a negative attitude towards the police. Teenagers have told us that the police do not respect them, and they in return do not respect the police. Attitudes generally become more negative with age. Pre-adolescent children generally respect the police and welcome them as a protective presence.

Many young people have told us how they would like to work with the police to help them develop their practices towards young people. 11 MILLION appreciates that many police forces across the country are engaging creatively with children and young people to improve practice and public safety.



**A checklist for police officers to make stop and search better:**

- **Explain how important it is to stop and search people**
- **Don't search young people in a public place**
- **Make positive / good conversation with young people**
- **Thank the young people and show your appreciation for their time**
- **Don't jump to conclusions all the time**
- **Don't shout, don't be aggressive – show respect**

**Compiled by London youth project**

Some of the young people we have spoken to say metal detectors in schools may promote fear, while others would welcome them as a protective or deterrent measure. Most project members agree that if

they are to be introduced, they should be used at all schools, to avoid stigmatising, and adding to fear.

Young people say amnesties may have a positive effect in the short term but that they will not improve safety over a sustained period. In particular, they doubt that that the minority of young people who carry knives with the intent of using them, would be amongst those handing in their weapons.

*11 MILLION believes stop and search can have a positive but limited role. The number that lead to arrests for knife possession is low, especially for Section 60 searches. 11 MILLION sees no evidence that amnesties have a sustained positive effect.*



**‘Lock people up who use knives, guns and are violent, so they will not do it again and to deter other people.’**

**11 MILLION’s annual event**

**‘anyone who uses knives will just end up in jail.’**

**Lisa, 13**

Most of the project’s young people believe that custodial sentences should only be used in cases of wounding. They see a clear difference between carrying and using, although they appreciate that carrying can lead to using. They therefore believe that young people caught in possession of a knife should, for a first offence, receive a warning and be required to attend a knife education programme which will bring home the consequences and dangers of carrying.

*Although the penalties for knife crime have stiffened, and the presumption of prosecution has recently been strengthened, the level of offending has not reduced. To date, therefore, there is no evidence that stronger sentencing has had a deterrent effect.*

*In conclusion, 11 MILLION’s work with children and young people through this project, and our contact with numerous other projects, demonstrates that the problem of knife crime is best tackled by understanding the views and experiences of those most directly affected, and by working with them to implement solutions.*

## 4 Case studies

### Hakeem, 18, from Manchester

“There’s no specific person who carries a knife. Anyone is capable. I come from somewhere which is meant to be a difficult place, but I don’t carry a knife, I have never carried a knife. But other people around here, who have the same background, they do carry a knife. It’s just the choice I made and the choice they made. Maybe I know that if I do carry a knife it’s going to get me in trouble, you know, with the police or I’m going to get hurt, and then I can’t do what I want with my life. But maybe they don’t think they have much a life, or maybe they don’t understand what will happen to them.”

“There are a few reasons for young people carrying a knife. They might feel threatened because they think other people are carrying them. It’s a fashion accessory to some people, who want to look hard, or it could be for criminal use, people who actually want to use them. But it’s like a chain reaction. If someone knows someone else has a knife they carry one and then that person gets in a fight and uses it and so more people carry them because they’re frightened thinking that lots of other people are carrying them.



**‘I’ve been stopped and searched so many times since the age of 14 I’ve lost count.’**

**Hakeem, from Manchester**

“I think the age range [for carrying knives] is from 15 up, maybe younger, I don’t know for sure. Knives are very available to all ages. They’re not illegal and you can just get them from your own house. They’re less available in shops but if you’re over 18, or if you look over 18, there’s no reason why you can’t get a knife.

“In London the media coverage reflects the amount of knife crime. It happens in other places but when I think of knife crime I think of London. But here [Manchester] too there’s definitely more young people carrying them than five years ago, and the crime rate has gone up for young people involved in knife crime and violence, which is obviously going to happen if more people carry knives.

“In my experience of stop and search policies, they haven’t been effective. I’ve been stopped and searched more times than many people I know are involved in carrying knives. I’ve never been arrested because I’ve never carried a knife. But I’ve been stopped and searched so many times since the age of 14 I’ve lost count. Some of the police can be very good. They can be normal and speak to you in a polite manner. Some are very heavy-handed and assume you’re a criminal.

I know they're doing their job and there would be no order without police but certain police officers are over the top. They don't help the situation. They worsen the feeling towards the police. Generally young people don't like the police. Stop and search can be a good policy but it needs to be done properly. There's a way to get round stop and search. Only if you're in groups is when you get stopped and it depends how you dress. If I'm wearing jeans and just casual clothes and if I'm on my own, I won't be stopped. But if I'm in a group wearing trackies I'm more likely to be stopped.

"If they're caught carrying a knife I think they should get a minimal sentence like probation something like that. What good does locking them up do? You need to ask why they're carrying and if they understand the seriousness. Locking them up would be bad because they could get worse. They should get intervention. Help and advice. People should sit them down, find out the reasons and educate them. If you use the knife, the sentence should be heavy. They need to be deterred. Young people are doing it because they are getting away with it. When they are locked up they should have counselling so that they learn what they are doing wrong and the reasons behind it."

### ***Janeece, teenager, from Manchester***

*Why do you think young people carry knives?*

"I think young people carry knives to feel protected or they might feel that they are hard just because they are carrying a knife but they don't realise the consequences of carrying a knife."

*You say that some young people carry them because they feel protected. What do you mean by that?*

"They hear a lot of stuff in the newspaper about people being affected by knife crime but they don't know if it's going to come their way soon. They might think, yeah, it's going to hit them but they don't really know."

*Do you think some young people carry knives actually to use them, with a desire to use them?*

"No, not really. I think people from different areas, they might have heard something about knife crime that's gone on in [another] area so they might feel that if they go in that area that it might happen to them... but it might not happen as often as the newspapers are saying."



**'Knives are very available because you can just go in your kitchen drawer.'**

**Janeece, from Manchester**

*Do you know of people who carry knives?*

"I know of one boy [who carries a knife] but I don't really know of many."

*How old is that boy?*

"The boy is 11 nearly 12."

*Have you spoken to him about this?*

"I asked him the reason why he carries a knife, the knife, and he says because he feels protected. He's afraid of what's going to come even though he's not part of any gangs or anything."

*What do you think the consequences could be for him for carrying a knife?*

"He might end up hurting somebody or he might get himself into really deep trouble or it could get it put on his criminal record."

*How available do you think knives are to young people?*

"Knives are very available because you can just go in your kitchen drawer and get the sharpest knife there is there, so they're very available."

*Do you think that once a young person decides to carry a knife and is walking around with it, that stop and search can help reduce knife crime?*

"Stop and search could help a little but as well people might feel intimidated about somebody touching them and going into their own personal space."

*Have you ever been stopped and searched?*

"No."

*Do you know of friends who have been stopped and searched?*

"I know a couple of friends."

*Have they told you about that experience?*

"They said that they didn't like it because they didn't like the way the police were touching them and the way they were talking to them and that they weren't talking to them politely, they were talking in a rude manner."

*Are you against stop and search?*

"No, not really because I think it's helped to reduce it a little but as well people that are carrying knives might just end up walking past police while an innocent person is getting searched."

*What do you think should happen to a young person who is caught carrying a knife?*

"They should get the knife taken off them as well they should be told the dangers of carrying a knife and maybe given a warning."

*How about the young person who actually uses a knife?*

"I think they should get locked up and as well I think that during the time they are locked up someone should go up to them and talk to them and ask them the real reason why they are carrying a knife."

*Do you think there's a lot of coverage of knife crime in the media at the moment?*

"A little bit but it's a mixture of gun and knife crime."

*Do you think that the media coverage reflects the amount of knife crime there is?*

"I think a little bit because young people might read a newspaper and hear about this stabbing or something and then they think I should carry a knife just in case that happens to me."



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